



MEMORANDUM

Date: September 14, 2006

To: Board of Park Commissioners

From: Charles Ng, Manager, Magnuson Park & Business Resources, Enterprise Division

Re: Motorized Model Airplanes in Seattle Parks

Requested Board Action

This briefing paper is in response to the Park Board's request for a public hearing on the issue of motorized model airplanes in Seattle Parks. The Board requested a staff briefing, a review of other public agency concerns, and public testimony about the issue. The Board was asked by supporters of motorized model airplanes to make a recommendation on Parks' decision to terminate its experimental permit that was issued to the Lake Sawyer Hawks R/C Club to launch motorized model airplanes at Ferdinand Dock on Lake Washington Boulevard.

Staff is requesting that the Board support the Superintendent's decision to cancel the experimental permit for motorized aircraft use at Ferdinand Dock.

Project Description and Background

What is the project background? The Lake Sawyer Hawks R/C Club approached Parks in January 2006 to obtain a permit to launch its motorized model airplanes from the Ferdinand Dock along Lake Washington Boulevard. The group stated they had been flying at that location regularly since early 2005 without complaints and without a permit. In September 2005, Parks posted signs stating that it was illegal to fly motorized planes in Seattle Parks pursuant to SMC 18.12.265.

Parks staff met with the club several times in March 2006 and agreed to an on site demonstration. Since this is a unique recreation opportunity, Parks agreed to issue an experimental permit with the condition that it be terminated if there were adverse impacts to the neighborhood or the environment. The permit was issued in April 2006. Parks received complaints in April, May, and June about noise and the potential impact from the planes on the wildlife in and around the area (attachment C). Parks decided to terminate the permit and sent a letter to the Club on June 16th giving the Club 30 days notice of termination. Subsequently, Club members testified to the Board of Park

Commissioners and asked the Board to intercede on its behalf. The Board decided to schedule a briefing and public hearing on this issue.

What is being proposed? Parks staff has concluded that this activity is not suitable for this location and reaffirms its decision to terminate the permit issued to Lake Sawyer R/C Club. The Ferdinand Dock is on the western side of Andrews Bay and is in close proximity to nearby residences on Lake Washington Boulevard, near an environmentally sensitive area, and public swimming beach (attachment A). Seattle Municipal Code 18.12.265 prohibits this activity unless permitted by the Superintendent on a case by case basis. When this activity was initially permitted, it was an exception to this rule and was conditional on it not being a negative impact to the public, that it was being permitted on a temporary basis, and that the location was suitable for the activity. The decision to issue an experimental permit and terminate it is authorized in the permit and within the authority of the Superintendent.

Other jurisdiction and location for activity: King County enforces an ordinance similar to the City's prohibiting this type of activity at its parks; however, under a very controlled situation and at the ideal site, the County has permitted motorized aircraft to be flown from a grassy field at Marymoor Park. The permitted location is a grass runway, 100 feet by 340 feet, with a usable airspace of 800 feet by 2000 feet. The area is well buffered from nearby homes and is managed and maintained by the Marymoor R/C Club.

Public Involvement Process

There were no formal public meetings leading up to the Park Board public hearing. Public outreach efforts were focused on informing the public about this hearing. Notices were mailed to the Club, to approximately 2,000 nearby neighbors and to local community organizations. Parks standard press release was sent to the media, the agenda and instructions for public testimony have been posted on the Board's web page, and 2 signs have been placed at the Ferdinand site informing the public about the hearing.

Issues

Noise from the planes: As mentioned, Parks has received complaints about the noise, specifically from nearby residents. The geography of the area, with Bailey Peninsula at Seward Park on the eastern side of Andrews Bay, acts like a wall that allows sound to echo and reverberate throughout the bay with significant impact to homes.

Environmental sensitivity: Parks received concerns from our Park Naturalists about this activity potentially endangering habitat areas close by. This is a prime habitat area for the endangered red spotted turtles, as well as river otters, beaver and more.

Harbor Patrol and Aquatic Recreation: City of Seattle Harbor Patrol staff has expressed concerns about this activity at this location, including the potential danger of the planes malfunctioning and hitting people at the swimming beach, which is one half mile to the south. At the on site demonstration the planes flew quite a range. The Seattle Harbor

Code also restricts the speed within Andrews Bay to a maximum of 3 knots. The speed required for the takeoff or landing of a model plane would exceed three knots. When a motorized plane is touching the water they are governed by marine laws and are out of compliance.

Open Water Swimming: Because of the required reduced speed for vessels and the protected nature of the bay, this is the most popular location for open water swimming within the entire City. Swimmers must stay along the western shoreline of Andrews Bay, passing through the staging area at Ferdinand Street. The operation of these planes poses a public safety risk for swimmers.

Small Craft Operation: The protected waters of Andrews Bay also draw the small boats from Mount Baker Rowing and Sailing Center (MBRSC) in search of waters protected from southern winds. The rowing shells, small kayaks and other boats use the western side of the bay as a practice corridor. In addition, MBRSC, in partnership with Parks Environmental Education unit, runs water based environmental education programs in the bay where people in small boats are able to closely observe activity in the natural habitat.

Recreational Boating: Two-thirds of the bay along the eastern side is the only approved anchorage area for recreational boaters within the City of Seattle. This area is already at maximum capacity for use, so the addition of motorized aircraft is incompatible and pushes the area into an over-use state.

Staff Recommendation

The decision to terminate the experimental use permit should be upheld.

Additional Information

Attachments:

- A. Aerial view of Ferdinand loading dock and vicinity
- B. Picture of Marymoor R/C Club site.
- C. Copies of letters and e-mail complaints



Ferdinand Street Boat Launch

200 0 200 400



Feet

1 inch equals 400 feet



©2006, CITY OF SEATTLE
All rights reserved.

No warranties of any sort, including accuracy, fitness or merchantability accompany this product.

Orthophoto source:
Walker and Assoc., March 2005
Map date: September 29, 2006